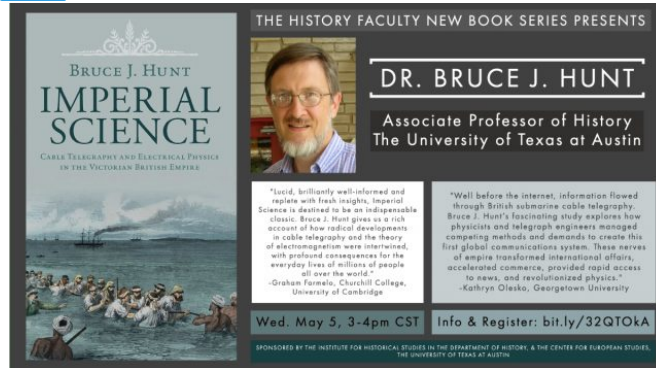


NOT EVEN PAST

Search the site ...



IHS Book Talk: "Imperial Science" by Bruce J. Hunt



Institute for Historical Studies, Wednesday May 5, 2021

The History Faculty New Book Series presents:

Imperial Science: Cable Telegraphy and Electrical Physics in the Victorian British Empire

(Cambridge University Press, 2021)

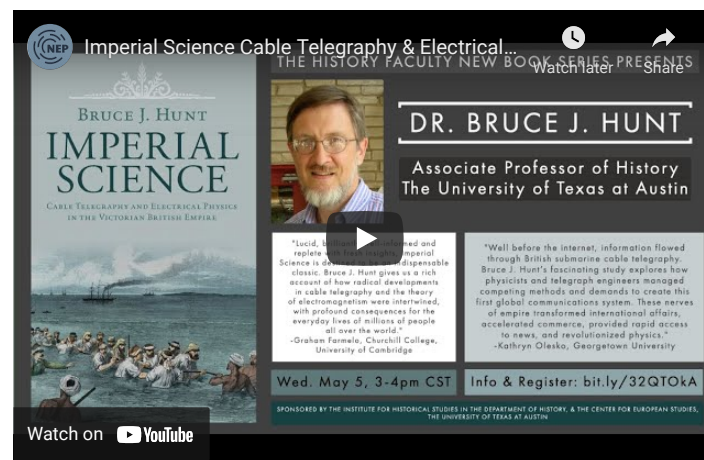
A book talk and discussion with

BRUCE J. HUNT

Associate Professor of History

The University of Texas at Austin

<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/faculty/huntbj>



In the second half of the nineteenth century, British firms and engineers built, laid, and ran a vast global network of submarine telegraph cables. For the first time, cities around the world were put into almost instantaneous contact, with profound effects on commerce, international affairs, and the dissemination of news. Science, too, was strongly affected, as cable telegraphy exposed electrical researchers to important new phenomena while also providing a new and vastly larger market for their expertise. By examining the deep ties that linked the cable industry to work in electrical physics in the

nineteenth century – culminating in James Clerk Maxwell's formulation of his theory of the electromagnetic field – Bruce J. Hunt sheds new light both on the history of the Victorian British Empire and on the relationship between science and technology.'Lucid, brilliantly well-informed and replete with fresh insights, Imperial Science is destined to be an indispensable classic. Bruce J. Hunt gives us a rich account of how radical developments in cable telegraphy and the theory of electromagnetism were intertwined, with profound consequences for the everyday lives of millions of people all over the world.'

–Graham Farmelo, Churchill College, University of Cambridge

'Well before the internet, information flowed through British submarine cable telegraphy. Bruce J. Hunt's fascinating study explores how physicists and telegraph engineers managed competing methods and demands to create this first global communications system. These nerves of empire transformed international affairs, accelerated commerce, provided rapid access to news, and revolutionized physics.'

–Kathryn Olesko, Georgetown University

With impressive skill, Bruce J. Hunt brings together the commercial and engineering practices of Victorian telegraphy with the construction of the new physics of electromagnetic field theory. In so doing, he powerfully reinvigorates the history of nineteenth-century physics as a major academic arena grounded upon, but not determined by, imperial engineering and technology.'

–Crosbie Smith, University of Kent

Dr. Bruce Hunt is an Associate Professor in the Department of History, at the University of Texas at Austin, where he specializes in the history of science and technology. He is the author of *The Maxwellians* (Cornell University Press, 1991) and *Pursuing Power and Light: Technology and Physics from James Watt to Albert Einstein* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). Professor Hunt's current work focuses on the relationship between technology and science in the 19th century, and particularly on the interaction between theory and practice in the Victorian telegraph industry. He also has strong interests in the history of nuclear weapons and of evolutionary theory. His teaching interests include the history of modern science, the history of technology, and modern British history. Read more about this work on his [profile page](#), and [personal website](#).

This discussion is part of the IHS History Faculty New Book Series.

Sponsored by: Institute for Historical Studies in the Department of History, and Center for European Studies.

Posted May 6, 2021

[More IHS & Public History](#)

RECENT POSTS

IHS Podcast: Hungry for Revolution

The McFarland Cuban Plantation Records

IHS Podcast – Episode 3: "Apache Diaspora in four hundred years of colonialism vs 'Toltec Antiquities' Diaspora in Early Republican Mexico"

Workshop: "The Mexican Empire and Indigenous Texas, 1821-1823" by Sheena Cox, University of Texas at Austin

This is Democracy: Shadow Docket and Abortion

NOT EVEN PAST is produced by

The Department of History

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

We are supported by the College of Liberal Arts

And our **READERS**

[DONATE](#)[CONTACT](#)

All content © 2010-present NOT EVEN PAST and the authors, unless otherwise noted

Sign up to receive the monthly Not Even Past newsletter

SUBSCRIBE

[FEATURES](#)[BOOKS](#)[TEACHING](#)[DIGITAL & FILM](#)[BLOG](#)[IHS](#)[TEXAS](#)[SPOTLIGHT](#)[ABOUT](#)